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Swiss court reopens probe of alleged espionage by Kazakh agents

NOVEMBER 1, 2016 BY JOSEPH FITSANAKIS ([HTTPS://INTELNEWS.ORG/AUTHOR/INTELNEWSJOE/](https://intelnews.org/author/intelnewsjoe/)) [LEAVE A COMMENT \(HTTPS://INTELNEWS.ORG/2016/11/01/01-2002/#RESPOND\)](#)



Viktor Khrapunov in 2012
Image credit: TengriNews

BY JOSEPH FITSANAKIS | SENIOR EDITOR | [intelNews.org](https://intelnews.org)

A Swiss court has reopened an investigation of alleged espionage activities by agents of the government of Kazakhstan against a high-profile political exile living in Switzerland. The case, which dates to 2014, centers on Viktor Khrapunov, a former senior Kazakh government official, who has been living in Geneva since 2008. In the years immediately following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Khrapunov served as Kazakhstan's Minister for Energy and Coal, a post that was later renamed to Minister of Energy and Natural Resources. After 1997, he was appointed mayor of Almaty, Kazakhstan's largest city, which is inhabited by 10 percent of the country's population. But by 2006, Khrapunov had fallen out with the government of Kazakhstan's authoritarian President Nursultan Nazarbayev. The government claimed that Khrapunov was embroiled in a series of fraudulent real-estate schemes and that he laundered large sums of money for his own personal use.

In 2008, a chartered airplane carrying Khrapunov and his wife landed in Switzerland, reportedly with a millions of dollars in cash, fine jewelry and antiques onboard. The Khrapunovs were granted asylum in the small alpine country and have since lived in the Lake Geneva area. In 2012, the government of Kazakhstan requested that Khrapunov be placed on Interpol's list of wanted persons. Khrapunov himself dismissed the charges against him as politically motivated and blasted Nazarbayev as "a third-world dictator".

In early 2014, the Swiss Attorney General's office opened an investigation into allegations by Khrapunov that he had been followed around by Kazakh intelligence officers, had an electronic tracker covertly installed in his car, and had his computers hacked by Kazakh spies. The case was closed in March of this year, after Swiss authorities said they did not have enough evidence to confirm the precise identity of the perpetrators, two of whom were reportedly holders of British passports. On Monday, however, the Federal Criminal Court in the Swiss city of Bellinzona ordered that the case be reopened (<http://www.lematin.ch/suisse/admission-recours-loligarque-khrapunov/story/19345477>), after allegations by Khrapunov that the espionage against him continues.

Kazakh authorities have been regularly accused by European governments of conducting aggressive espionage and intimidation operations targeting exiled adversaries of President Nazarbayev. Last year, Kazakhstan's former spy chief and a former presidential bodyguard were acquitted (<https://intelnews.org/2015/07/14/01-1734/>) after a lengthy trial in Austria after a co-defendant in their double-murder trial, who was also the Kazakh president's former son-in-law, was found dead in his Vienna cell.

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